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USSR: The production of crude oil from the remote, but rich, oilfields of West Siberia is to be accelerated to compensate for declining rates of growth in older producing areas.

A decree published yesterday orders production in West Siberia to be increased ten-fold by 1980. This raises the 1980 target there from the range of 135-160 million tons to 230-260 million tons. The goal for total production of crude oil in the USSR in 1980, recently set at 550-600 million tons, remains unchanged, however. No substantial change is predicted for the Soviet export position.

Some 70 percent of Soviet oil now comes from the favorably located Urals-Volga region. In 1967 a Soviet spokesman predicted that production in that region would increase to a peak of 240 million tons per year in 1980, but it now seems probable that annual production in the next few years will be stabilized at a level of about 200 million tons. West Siberia appears to be the only region where the Soviets can hope to compensate for the slowing rate of growth in production from the Urals-Volga region.

The oil deposits in West Siberia are known to be huge, but considerable capital investment will be required to develop them. Difficult geological formations will greatly increase the drilling requirements and will necessitate the application of sophisticated technology, which the Soviet oil industry has yet to master. West Siberia also is distant from the principal oil consuming regions of the country and is poorly served with power lines, roads, railroads, and pipelines. Accelerated development of oil extraction in the region will double the Soviet requirement for pipe, a commodity that already is in very short supply. The severe climate and marshy terrain of West Siberia hamper all operations, and the harsh living conditions make it hard to attract and retain labor. [redacted]

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Central Intelligence Bulletin

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Western Europe: A Dutch proposal for an alternative to the multirole combat aircraft (MRCA) project will probably not meet approval by Bonn, the largest potential backer.

The Dutch bowed out of the MRCA consortium last July, objecting to the project's high costs and numerous political factors that have hindered its development. They have attempted to arouse interest in a "mini-consortium" that could achieve the same goal as the MRCA--replacement of the F-104, which has been the backbone of the interceptor force of many allied countries during the past decade.

The Dutch want a cooperative venture that would provide them with 100 light, highly maneuverable air-superiority fighters; they are willing to consider construction of an existing aircraft by their consortium. The likely prospects include the Northrop P-530, the SAAB Viggen, and the Dassault F-1.

Defense Minister Den Toom has told US officials that, probably by April, the Italians, who have been unhappy with the MRCA project, will join the Norwegians, Canadians, and Dutch in the "mini-consortium." He claims that the Swiss, Australians, Japanese, and Iranians have also shown interest, and that there is a good chance that Bonn will join as well.

West German support for the MRCA continues unabated, however, and because it is the largest purchaser of the new fighters, Bonn could determine the fate of a consortium's effort. The MRCA fulfills West German fighter requirements more completely than do the aircraft the Dutch have in mind.

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